

The Lost of a master among the masters

Yamaguchi Toru O'sensei passed away on July 31st 2010. Yamaguchi O'sensei was the chief instructor of Todokai International. Todokai International is the association promoting the Shôtôkan the way Yamaguchi Tôru O'sensei has taught.

Yamaguchi Toru O'sensei went over 80 countries to promote the JKA. He went to Africa, Europe, South Asia, North America, and South America.

The first time, I really met Yamaguchi Tôru Sensei was in a training in Montreal, Canada. I saw, with my own eyes, Yamaguchi Tôru Sensei, 8th dan JKA, at that time, asking Nishiyama Sensei how to land the front foot on a certain movement of the kata Jitte. I said to myself if this sensei is humble enough to ask questions about a movement in a kata, it is because he still wants to learn. This is the instructor I have to follow. I do not regret my choice and if I had to do it again I would do the same thing.

More than that, during that training, he took me apart and asked me to follow him. Then, he corrected me Nijushiho. I was godan JKA at that time, I remember like it was yesterday. My choice was made. I would follow him.

Since that year, I would train as much as I could with him, so I decided to go to Japan twice a year, for two weeks each time, to train under him. One year, I told Sensei that I would go for a month. He told me that I would stay at his house.

After training, his wife (who passed away three years ago) was preparing the meals, while we were taking a glass of Shochu. Sometimes, Mrs. Yamaguchi was taking a small glass of sake with us. After the excellent meals, Mrs. Yamaguchi was going back in her room to paint. At that time, Sensei and I were speaking about his young years in karate. He told me that after finishing his studies at the Komazawa University and the JKA training course, he decided to dedicate his life to karate. Also, often he was speaking about the importance of the family, the respect of each other. He was more than a master; he was a human and very generous towards anyone who was respecting the others.

Sensei has not given it to me easily, training twice a day: two or three hours each time. We had to know each other and the best way was to train hard and give the maximum. He, once, told me, « You never give up». I smiled back to him and trained even harder. Sometimes, when the stress of training was too much, he was giving a break and joking, but the minute he decided the break was over, we had to train even more than before. But those trainings were so good for my spirit, soul and body; I could feel the peace from within afterwards.

Sensei has taught me the 30 katas, he wanted that we practice in the Shotokan Todokai group. Each time, I was coming in Japan; Sensei was asking me to perform the 30 katas. We were doing 4 katas a day, repeating them several times. Luckily, I was practicing them in my private dôjo until the umbusen was perfect, so he could see that I was practicing them. At that time, Sensei was able to focus on special parts of the kata and helping me to understand more deeply the real meaning of the kata.

Coming to Canada, many times, Sensei stayed at my house and many nights after training we were speaking together about spiritual aspect of karate. Once, I spoke to him about «San mi ittai». He asked me who spoke to you about this. I said Nakayama O'sensei. He told me, «You are the first one speaking to me about spiritual aspect of karate. He, then, told me about his understanding of «San mi ittai».

One day, at the Todokai Honbu dôjo, Éric Lejeune Sensei, from France, was looking at the Gichin Funakoshi's shôdo (calligraphy), and then Yamaguchi Sensei said to us, «Alain Sensei, this shôdo is for you». At the end of the class, he gave it to me. He told me, « Now, you have to dedicate your life to true karate-dô». I could not believe it. I realize, today, that I am just the guardian of the calligraphy until I find someone who will dedicate his life to karate-do the way Yamaguchi O'sensei wanted.

When Sensei told me that he wanted to create Todokai International, I said to him, «Trust me Sensei, I will do it». He said, «I cannot trust you; all I can do is to see what you will do». He gave me the biggest lesson on human being. It was so true. Many speak but how many do what they say.

When I did my hachidan (8th dan) exam, two years ago, as usual, Yamaguchi sensei told me «Alain sensei, you are going to have a fifteen minute exam, just kata for you, come and see me in the morning before we go to the dôjo». On that morning, I ate just a bit not to have the stomach full. Éric Lejeune and I went to Yamaguchi sensei's house on time. Sensei told us that he had changed his mind and to come just after lunch. No time to eat for lunch. We came back at sensei's house then went to the dôjo. The exam started and lasted 2 hours and half: Kata, kihon, kumite, then more kata, then another one, then more kumite, finish kihon waza. Then sensei decided another kata. Sensei said, «Result later». We were exhausted; Sensei had asked all we had. I said to Éric Lejeune, « We did our best, let Sensei decides».

At night, we went to Yamaguchi Sensei's house, after eating Japanese sushi and drank sake. We enjoyed the evening not thinking about anything. Then, Yamaguchi Sensei gave us the result: **Success.**

Mr. Andy Holmes, who met Yamaguchi Sensei several times, said, « I hope everyone remembers his energy, spirit, character and contribution to karate». Many, who had trained under him, will remember something of Sensei, the man.

I do remember Yamaguchi Tôru O'sensei.

Alain Faucher, 8th dan, shihan,
President Todokai International